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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

Security Council
Fifty-fifth year

Letter dated 10 April 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith a press statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued on 10 April 2000 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 20 (a) and 46, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Fesseha A. **Tessema**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 10 April 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Press Statement

The Ethiopian Government has learnt from media sources that the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in the April 9 edition of the Sunday Times of London has made remarks regarding the current drought emergency in Ethiopia and the conflict with Eritrea.

It has been reported that Mr. Annan has declared that the response of the international community to the emergency was adequate and that enough food supplies were in the country.

The Secretary General is also reported to have stated that the problem was essentially one of distribution; that the country was large, the terrain difficult, and that the government could have done a better job of distribution as food was not properly distributed.

Furthermore, Mr. Annan is quoted to have said that the border war with Eritrea had closed many access routes to the afflicted areas, particularly South Eastern Ethiopia and that the port of Massawa could not be used by the World Food Program as desired.

The Ethiopian Government has high regard for Secretary General Kofi Annan and is profoundly surprised by the remarks attributed to him. If it is indeed true that Mr. Annan expressed these views, the Ethiopian Government would prefer to believe that this is due to lack of adequate information.

The true facts are the following:

1. The international community certainly did not respond adequately to Ethiopia's numerous appeals, and this can be ascertained from the concerned international agencies themselves. It is to be recalled that in view of the fact that the drought was worsening over the past few years the Ethiopian Government publicly and energetically appealed for food aid.

In December 1998 and in the following month Ethiopia issued an appeal covering the needs for the year 1999.

Again in November 1999, Ethiopia issued an advance warning and then in January 2000, sent out an appeal for the year 2000.

It can therefore, be clearly seen that the shortage of grain in the country is not due to lack of appeals by the Ethiopian side. The causes have to be found else where.

It also cannot be forgotten that Ethiopia's food reserves which were built since 1994/95 and which had reached some 315,500 tons were depleted by borrowing from the donor countries and agencies themselves.
In this regard:

- The World Food Programme borrowed 99,776.50 metric tons of grain
- The United States Agency for International Development borrowed 93,517.06 metric tons
- The European Union borrowed 80,867.65 metric tons
- The Netherlands borrowed 15,000.00 metric tons
- Canada borrowed 385.47 metric tons
- Germany borrowed 17.00 metric tons

  A total of 292,449.54 metric tons of grain were borrowed from the food reserve.

Despite regular reminders, none of these amounts of grain have been replenished.

Faced with this situation, the Ethiopian Government had to act quickly. It took its responsibilities in hand and in order to avoid a further deterioration of the situation, purchased 100,000 tons of grain locally for current distribution to the needy population.

As far as the international community is concerned, it is true that very recently some confirmed pledges in writing have begun to be made in response to Ethiopia's persistent appeals.

The US pledged 214,690 metric tons in March 2000, Canada 9,000 metric tons this month; and the UK 6,240 metric tons in February of this year. Except from what are heard from media sources, no official pledges have been registered from the European Union. Despite the many appeals, what has arrived in the port of Djibouti just last week is 30,000 metric tons of grain from the World Food Program and this shipment is currently being transported into the country.

These are the facts. The statement that there was adequate response from the international community is simply not true.

2. As regards, the charge that the real problem is one of distribution and lack of access it should be clear to all concerned that it is only when grain is available that it can be distributed. There is no evidence to even suggest that difficult terrain and the lack of access to some ports has been a cause for the famine.

Moreover, anyone familiar with the geography of the country and region cannot lose sight of the fact that the Eritrean ports of Massawa and Assab have no relevance to the areas currently hardest hit by the drought in the South-Eastern part of the country. The closest ports to this most

badly affected region are the ports of Djibouti and Berbera. The fact that Berbera is ignored while much is said about Massawa and Assab casts doubt as to whether the real agenda is the relief operation.

If such is the case it cannot be forgotten that in May 1998 over 70,000 tons of grain destined for Ethiopia from the Untied States, Canada and the World Food Program was looted by the Eritrean regime. The Eritrean regime which is alien to the rule of law, has not been held publicly accountable for this theft. Under the circumstances, suggestions to use Eritrean ports can only make Ethiopia doubly doubtful regarding the intentions of those who champion the issue.

It is not the desire of the Ethiopian Government in the face of the emergency to dwell over who did what over the past two to three years. What is urgent is to ensure that adequate assistance is secured and received by those who need it. This is the objective that the international community too, should direct itself towards. Efforts to create a linkage between the consequences of the drought with other political objectives can only result in negative consequences.

3. Finally, as for what Mr. Annan is reported to have said in connection with African leadership, Ethiopia does not wish to respond in view of the esteemed regard Ethiopia has towards the Secretary General.

10th April 2000
Ministry of Foreign Affairs